

Hobbies

Nader stamps 'waste' on blue suede blitz

By Roger Boye

The selection of an Elvis Presley postage stamp has sparked a behind-the-scenes debate about how Uncle Sam should promote the products it makes for coin and stamp collectors.

On one side is hobby newspaper Numismatic News (among others), which called the Presley stamp "a stroke of public-relations genius" that's given the U.S. Postal Service "gobs of free publicity that would cost it gobs of money if it were paid publicity."

By comparison, the United States Mint looks weak in its efforts to promote the sale of collectible coins and government medals, as well as to mark important events. For example, the mint did little to celebrate its own bicentennial in April.

"Don't be cruel, but can you imagine the Treasury thinking of a publicity coup like [the Elvis stamp] when it comes to the U.S.

Mint's products? Neither can we," said a News editorial.

On the other side of the debate is consumer activist Ralph Nader, who accused the Postal Service of waste and mismanagement in spending almost \$300,000 to conduct the Presley stamp poll. The money went for printing posters and counting ballots, among other things, according to documents obtained for Nader under the Freedom of Information Act.

Nader contends that the Postal Service will have to sell about one million stamps to collectors who won't use the stamps to recoup the \$300,000.

"The question is . . . no longer whether or not citizens have seen Elvis, but whether or not citizens have seen their neighborhood collection box, on-time mail delivery, affordable postage rates or a post office without lines," Nader said in a statement.

Robin Minard, speaking for the Postal Service, said on May 11 that the service grossed \$190 mil-

lion last year on the sale of stamps to collectors, with a net profit of \$175 million. The service expects to sell more Presley stamps than it would a "normal" commemorative issue, she said.

Meanwhile, the winning Presley stamp will be announced June 4 in Memphis. More than a million ballots were received in the selection process, but Minard refused to say whether the image of a young, handsome Presley or the older, chubby Presley had more votes.

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Uncle Sam's newest bronze medal marks the bicentennial of the United States Mint by depicting a rendition of the painting "Inspecting the First Coins."

The design shows Martha Washington, accompanied by her husband and others, viewing a coin made at the first mint building in Philadelphia. The medal's "tails side" features a collage of 15 U.S. coin designs.

To order a medal, send a check

to the United States Mint, Order Processing Branch, 10001 Aerospace Drive, Lanham, Md. 20706. A three-inch bronze medal costs \$21 and the 1½ inch bronze medal—which has a much small-

er surface area—costs \$2.25. Minimum order is \$10; allow at least three months for delivery.

The medal designs were selected in a competition open to all U.S. Mint employees.